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Notes

[Contributions in the form of notes or discussions should be sent to John A. Scott, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.]

SIMILES IN HOMER AND IN VIRGIL

It is a commonplace of Homeric scholarship that there are far more similes in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey* and that this fact has been pressed as an argument for a diversity of origin or of authorship. Finsler in his *Homer*, pp. 328 ff., places special emphasis on this chorizontic test. In a review of this book written for *Classical Philology*, X, 237, I wrote thus: "Professor Finsler lays stress on the fact that the *Iliad* has so many more similes than the *Odyssey*. The reason is evident; the *Iliad* has a theme most difficult to enliven or to diversify, the constant repetition of battles, military movements, and single combats would be tiresome indeed were the story not told with a wealth of poetic adornment, while the varied events of the *Odyssey* need no such embellishment." According to this reasoning it was diversity, not of origin, but of theme which influenced the number of similes. It has occurred to me that perhaps Virgil might throw some light on this matter, for the *Aeneid* in a general way follows the story of the *Odyssey* in the first books, the story of the *Iliad* in the last books. If the theme is really the decisive matter, then the descriptions of battle should have more similes than those of wanderings and adventures on sea and land. In Virgil's *Aeneid* any difference of usage must have some other explanation than diversity of authorship.

The third book of the *Aeneid*, describing the wanderings and adventures of Aeneas from the time he left ruined Troy until he landed on the shores of Africa, near Carthage, is strictly Odyssean in tone and in context, and this book of 718 verses has but a single simile, 679 f.

No book of the *Aeneid* is wholly given over to fighting, but the twelfth corresponds most nearly to the great battle scenes of the *Iliad*, and this book has eighteen similes. Book xii has 952 verses, that is, it has one simile to each fifty-three verses, while the average of the entire *Iliad* is one simile to each seventy-eight verses.

The table of similes as given by J. A. Thomson, *De comparationibus Vergilianis*, shows that in Virgil the fighting scenes make free use of similes, while the scenes of travel and adventure use them very sparingly. This is a pleasing confirmation of the contention that the difference in the use of similes as shown in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was due to diversity of theme, and is no proof of diversity of authorship.

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